



Celestial Bodies

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Celestial Bodies

Man makes his appearance on the surface of a celestial body in an existence commingled with that of plants and of other animals. This celestial body appears at some point of empty space, in that immensity revealed at night, driven by a complex movement of dizzying speed: gun shells are a million times slower than the earth in gravitation around the sun and the set of planets encircling the central galaxy.

To represent the reality of Earth as unrelated to this projection into space would be wrong; for the movement of celestial bodies is no less real than their mass. Now, the sun, carrying its swarm of planets along with it, performs so prodigious a revolution that even at 200 miles per second it has lasted at least 250 million years. If, however, you want the full sense of man's interest touching this voyage of his, you must do more than imagine its speed and the size of its orbit. If the sun were driven by a steady movement of gravitation around a center, the universe to which Earth belongs could, on the whole, be considered analogous to the closed system of our planetary revolutions (only the order of magnitude would have changed). Whereas the movement described by the sun and its planets about the galactic center opens, as it were, into and through the sky. When, indeed, we do perceive this movement within infinity—driving universes like our own—it in no way resembles the stable and geometric rings of Saturn; it seems hurled into space like a whirling explosion.

The galaxy to which we belong is composed of hundreds of millions of stars whose average size is equal to that of the sun. Its surface is so vast that light—at the speed of 186,000 miles per second—takes 100,000 years to cover its entire distance. Earth, which revolves somewhere in the middle region, is situated 30,000 light-years from the galaxy's axis, and earth dwellers would certainly never have known the form of this universe without the revelation, by means of very powerful telescopes, of worlds quite like ours, far beyond the cloud of stars within which our planet is buried. These worlds in the farthest distant parts of the sky appear rather like disks with swollen centers. Seen in profile, they look like Saturn with its two-ringed girdle, but on a much larger scale, and with a central sphere that is quite flat. But those visible head-on look

stranger: they develop, rather like a Medusa's head, a number of luminous extensions winding from the core out into space (whence the name of spirals given them by astronomers). Each of these threads is really composed of specks of what has been described as "stellar gas," that is, luminous matter formed by the accumulations of multitudes of swirling suns as distant from each other as the stars of our immediate sky. The whole system suggests the swirling suns of our light shows, and appears rather like a dazzling explosion of fireworks which vanished after a few seconds into the night. This image may be erroneous, and it is obvious that this swift violence, when transcribed into a chronology commensurate with the immensity of the revolving worlds, still takes the billions of years represented by a few dozen revolutions. According to Eddington (*The Rotation of the Galaxy*, Oxford, 1939), however, the precariousness of a universe like ours is reflected in the way it looks, and the immensely long detonation time of the spiral within which we rotate is due merely to the incomparable immensity of space involved. The underlying nature of the world from which we come is that of an explosive rotation of matter, nonetheless.

These considerations about ourselves have been made possible as knowledge developed (and they will surely vary, as that knowledge varies, as science advances). They are, in any case, wholly contrary to those representations which have established man and his earthly base as the seemingly immutable seat of human life — as the center and foundation of all possible reality. It would appear that man's natural anthropocentrism bears a relation to the galactic universe which is that of a feudal power to the over-distant center of imperial power. A domain has been marked off directly with the galaxy's whirlwind, such that it appears constituted as not subject to the reality of the universe, as entirely autonomous, to the point of perfect immobility set within the mad spin of it all. And even if human existence is really in the process of now discovering the universe that sustains it, this existence must acknowledge the universe as a spectacle external to it or else deny itself. How, indeed, can it claim to identify with the rapture of the heavens, acknowledging itself as spectacle viewing itself, when the fact of looking presupposes that the viewing subject has somehow escaped from the rapturous movement of the universe? All that we recognize as truth is necessarily linked to the error represented by the "stationary earth."

The spirals or galaxies, which unfurl their gigantic tentacles of light through the darkness of space, are composed of innumerable stars or stellar systems united in a "movement of the whole." Stars may be simple or complex. The solar system is no exception in the sky's immensity, and the stars may therefore be accompanied by a planetary whirlwind; in like manner, the planets known to us are often doubled by satellites. The sun is a star, as the earth is a planet or the moon a satellite; and if to this cycle we add comets, four sorts of heavenly bodies appear thus united by a "movement of the whole" within the galaxy. But each of these heavenly bodies possesses a "movement of the whole" particular to it. A star such as the sun, central core of the system to which it belongs, radi-

ates—that is, constantly projects part of its substance in the form of light and heat through space. (The considerable quantity of energy thus expended may originate in constant internal annihilation of the star's very substance.) This extraordinary loss is that of a star; whereas the radiation of a planet such as Earth is so weak as to be considered negligible. Earth, as a heavenly body, differs indeed from a star insofar as it is cold and does not shine. So that the movement of the whole which activates it does not merely differ quantitatively from that of an incandescent star, it is different in kind.

Heavenly bodies of any sort are composed of atoms, but if we consider just those stars of the highest temperature, we see that the atoms of radiant stars cannot be different in composition; they are in the power of the stellar mass and its central movement. The atoms of the earthly periphery, however—those of its surrounding atmosphere—are free of this power; they can enter and be part of forces which have developed independence in relation to the force of the mass. The surface of the planet is formed not only of molecules, each composed of a small number of atoms, but of much more complex elements, some crystalline, others colloidal, the latter resulting in the autonomous forces of life in plants, animals, men, in human society. Stars of relatively low temperature, including the sun, tolerate, if necessary, the molecules' fragile autonomy, but intense radiation keeps almost all of the mass in an atomized state. Cold Earth cannot keep the atoms of her surface within the power of an almost zero radiation, and the "movement of the whole" which forms around her moves in a direction contrary to that of the movement formed within a star with high temperature. The sun lavishes its force in space, while the particles which, on Earth's periphery, succeed in escaping the force of the central core and cohere to form ever higher power no longer expend, but rather consume, strength. All that which condenses and quickens on our Earth is thus marked by avidity. Not only is each complex particle avid of infinitely available solar energy or of remaining free earthly energy, but of all the accumulated energy in the other particles. Thus, in the absence of radiation, in the cold, Earth's surface is abandoned to a "movement of the whole" which seems a movement of general consumption, and whose salient form is life.

The crowning achievement of this tendency is anthropocentrism. The weakening of the terrestrial globe's material energy has enabled the constitution of the autonomous human existences which are so many misconceptions of the universe's movement. These existences may be compared to those of the feudal lord, who gains independence insofar as the central power ceases to have energetic action. But man's avidity, taken as a whole, is much greater than that of the local sovereign himself. The latter contents himself with preventing the king's agents from mixing in his affairs, while the human being loses awareness of the reality of his world—as the parasite is unaware of the pain or joy of those from whom it draws subsistence. Furthermore, in closing off ever more tightly the world about him so as to represent the sole principle of existence, he tends

to substitute his constitutive avidity for the sky's obvious prodigality; he thus gradually effaces the image of a heavenly reality free of inherent meaning or demand, replacing it with a personification (of an anthropomorphic kind) of the immutable idea of the Good.

Given these unfavorable conditions, there is but one way out. Those condemned by avidity to subordinate everything to the acquisition of energy define all that makes for further acquisition as being "of use." They have delimited, within the system of free universes, a world of "use" drawn back upon itself, isolated and imprisoned, whose structure is composed by implements, raw materials, and work. Thus, their only goal is that of an unquenchable greed. For the greater their wealth the more they proliferate; their productive force produces only new productive force, their greed in operation can produce only greater greed. The cycle of human energy began, therefore, to seem like a desperate trap, and men began to believe themselves condemned to observe the greed which drove them as a curse: their despair drove them to renunciation.

Since the nature of things is not to be changed by a curse, they have not grown less avid; their sense of malediction was all that changed.

There is but one way out; it is in vain that we deny our nature, and since we do seek power, we can only assent to the force we must be. To flee is ridiculous; one must go rather to the full limit of power. Existence in avidity attains, when fully developed, a point of disequilibrium at which it suddenly and lavishly expends; it sustains an explosive loss of the surplus of force it has so painfully accumulated. The amount of energy which thus escapes, though by no means negligible, is relatively low; however, it is no longer part of the world of use: use is then subordinate, it becomes the slave of loss.

When immediate avidity, whose principle is hunger, submits to the need to give, whether of one's own self or one's possessions, an inversion of wealth takes place. The impulse to avidity tends, it is true, to limit the giving as directed toward loss. The gift is used in the struggle between those engaged in securing the strength of others; for it can become a way of diminishing a rival's prestige. The true gift of the self, ecstasy—which is not only a link between the sexes—marks, nonetheless, the limit of greed, the chance of escape from cold movement, and of rediscovering the joy of sun and spiral.

But although the universe spends while remaining wholly free of the shadow cast by the possibility of exhausting its prodigality, such can no longer be the case for those fragile existences which multiply in cruel combat on Earth's surface. At least those more effective in their avidity, who have thereby acquired a greater potential for loss, have begun to be aware of the unsound, the catastrophic nature of all hoarding of useful power. Through loss man can regain the free movement of the universe, he can dance and swirl in the full rapture of those great swarms of stars. But he must, in the violent expenditure of self, perceive that he breathes in the power of death.